



February 2002

Air Force continues tradition of science fair

by Katherine Gleason, AFRL Public Affairs

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AFB, Ohio — More than one million junior and senior high school students are hard at work on the projects that might give them the opportunity to compete in the International Science and Engineering Fair this May in Louisville, Ky. While only a handful will emerge as winners, every participant should know that they share something in common with the commander of the Air Force Research Laboratory.

In 1968, AFRL Commander Maj. Gen. Paul D. Nielsen was a high school senior in Louisiana. His science fair project was a regional winner, and afforded him the opportunity to compete in the Louisiana State Science Fair. For Nielsen, this was just the beginning of a life-long interest in the areas of math and science.

"I've enjoyed my career as an Air Force scientist, and now I have the great fortune of heading the entire Air Force science and technology program," said Nielsen.

Realizing the importance of reaching out to promising young scientists, the Air Force is actively involved in science fairs. The Air Force, along with the Army and Navy, support approximately 350 regional fairs in the United States and Puerto Rico each February through April and presents more than 1,400 awards annually.

The goal of the Air Force Science Program is threefold. First, the program seeks to demonstrate Air Force interest in youth to parents, teachers, and the community. The second goal is the recognition and encouragement of students who are conducting research in areas of interest to the Air Force. Third, the Air Force wishes to acquaint students with career possibilities by providing Air Force visibility to tomorrow's scientists and engineers.

"The program offers a unique opportunity for both military and civilian personnel to develop young minds and make a lasting, positive impression in the community," said Air Force Science Fair Program Manager Sue Sobieski.

Air Force support at the regional level began in 1994. AFRL manages this program with extensive involvement from the Air Force Recruiting Service. As the mainstay of the regional program, the Air Force Recruiting Service, through the squadron commanders, works to match recruiters to fairs in their area. Each local recruiter is responsible for lining up judges and presenting Air Force awards. Regional fairs are administered by Science Service, a nonprofit organization committed to advancing scientific appreciation.

"The Recruiting Service is the heart and soul of the Air Force Science Fair program," said Sobieski. "Without their help in coordinating volunteer judges and Air Force involvement at each fair location, the program wouldn't have nearly the reach nor positive impact that it does."

The Air Force is also closely involved with the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF). To participate in ISEF, students must first compete in a school or local fair, and then a regional and/or state science fair. Approximately 1,200 students from more than 40 countries will present their projects at the 2002 ISEF. Awards are given in 15 categories including: physics, mathematics, computer science, engineering, and chemistry.

The Air Force presents awards to first and second place winners in each category. The Commander of the Air Force Recruiting Service is invited to present \$3,000 to each first place winner, and \$1,500 to each second place winner.

"I am proud of AFRL's support to science fairs throughout the country," said Nielsen. "We're helping to build a strong future for all science and engineering endeavors."

For more information on the Air Force Science Fair Program, contact Sobieski at Susan.Sobieski@afrl.af.mil, or at 937/656-9875. @